1.3: Documentation

Overview

Documentation is vital to successful collections salvage and well worth the time and resources that it consumes. Whether you are writing down the events of an emergency that didn't impact the collection material or whether you are taking pictures of collection items damaged from a burst water pipe, the importance of emergency response documentation cannot be overstated. Make it a priority!

This section introduces the basics of documentation including how it is accomplished, who should carry it out, and when it is done.

Think about your documentation as a memory backup for stressful times.

How to Document the Salvage Operations

Write down what you see. The information you make note of can be very brief, or it can be detailed, depending upon the severity of the event, the amount of collection and non-collection materials affected, and on the resources you have available. Observe, ask questions, consider everything as noteworthy. . They can be written in a table, as a narrative, or even just in point form. All of this information must be created, maintained, organised, shared, stored and updated throughout the salvage operation.

Save and backup all of the images and other digital documentation every day.

Take pictures of everything. Take photots or videos that show such things as how the material was found, the condition of the materials, the space where the disaster occurred, shelving, tables, and the room. Photo-document the people involved as they handle the collection, at the workstations, the various responders and all the various activities that will go on.

Set your digital camera or phone camera to time and date stamp each image to save time and ensure accuracy and to assist with written documentation efforts.

Keep documentation equipment in your Emergency Kits

- Use tools at hand or secure what you need, such as waterproof notebooks, a variety of colored waterproof pens, cell phones, cameras, tablets, voice recorders and flip charts.
- Photographs, sketches, maps and diagrams should supplement written notes to illustrate important points
- Cameras and other equipment should be safely stored and easily accessible at all times. Have extra batteries and portable battery chargers on hand.

Make sure your electronics are charged and ready at all times.

Who Does the Documentation?

One person should have overall responsibility for documentation. Whether this person does the documentation alone or has the assistance of a team, someone needs to document things. The documenter will work closely with the salvage coordinator to be sure that important aspects of the operation are recorded and to ensure that accurate and timely information is provided for reporting out and media communications.

In a smaller emergency, one person might be able to write everything down as well as take photos as things progress. As the emergency increases in severity, so does the amount of required documentation and the job could easily be a full-time responsibility. If this is the case, the documentation person shouldn't have any additional responsibilities.

Ideally, the person or people tasked with documentation has some history and knowledge of the collection and site, is well organized and is a good communicator.

When Does Documentation Take Place?

Documentation takes place at every stage of the emergency. This includes the 1st response, assessment and triage, salvage and recovery operations, from the earliest possible moment after the emergency is discovered even before responders are on site to resumption of normal site operations and the return of the collection for regular use. This can be a period of only a day or two, but in some situations it may go on for months or even years.

> **!** *When response and recovery activities last for an extended period, the quality of documentation can decline and steps to ensure that it remains consistent, thorough and accurate should be taken.*

There are Two Types of Documentation:

- **Non- Collection Event Documentation**
  This is the record of the event, its effect on site operations, and what is done in response. It does not generally include information about collection materials except in very general terms.
- **Collection Salvage Documentation**
  This is documentation of the collection's location, movements, condition and salvage.

Non-Collection Event Documentation

Why Do We Document the Event?

The stress and intensity of an emergency can make it difficult to remember everything clearly and accurately. Capturing details is essential for several reasons:

- It serves as a reference of decisions that were made and by whom. As such, it supports and gives structure to the next decisions as the crisis evolves
- It will be used to communicate vital information between response teams and other stakeholders
- It is a learning tool to improve future emergency preparedness and disaster recovery outcomes
- Accurate documentation is required for insurance claims and legal action
- It can be valuable for media releases and fund-raising

What is Non-Collection Event Documentation?

The **event** can be anything from a minor emergency such as a mold outbreak or a major disaster such as a flood, that affects your site, building or any part of your institution. **Documentation of the event is a record** of everything that has happened, what is being done to deal with the event and when, the people involved, and the decisions being made that relate to the event.

Event documentation does not include information about the collection objects such as their condition, location, and what is done to them. This type of documentation is discussed below.

What is Included in Event Documentation?

There are three aspects of the event that should be documented:

1. The Event and 1st Response
2. The Damage
3. The Salvage and Recovery

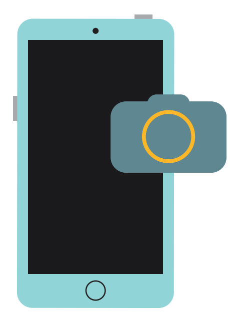
Take photos from various angles and distances. Pay attention to views of the exterior including the roof, windows, and doorways, and in the interior including toppled shelving, leaking ceilings, damaged computers, and water level marks. Try to identify any building feature that has changed, or might change, because of the event.

1. The Event and 1st Response (e.g. a sprinkler head failed and discharged water, staff and a commercial restoration company removed the water)

Write down a description of what happened in simple terms and note the time and date it occurred (often referred to as an Incident Log). Be sure to update this record if needed to include the duration of the event, whether it is over or ongoing, and contributing factors such as an exceptionally dry season or recent renovation work that may have played a role in the event.

Event documentation should also include details about the first response, such as who found out first, what time and day it was discovered, who was contacted, what supplies were secured, and so on. Include information about first responders who may have accessed the site before it was safe for others and what they did during that time.

2. The Damage (e.g. water poured down into the small collection storage room)



Make a record of the damage caused by the event to the site, and each building, room, or shelf that was affected. In a large-scale disaster, try to document everything that happened to the outside of the building and to the site. Include notes and pictures about the surrounding area if relevant (such as downed power lines on surrounding streets). Then, as safety permits, record information about what has occurred in the inside of the building(s). Documentation of a small-scale emergency would include details about the specific spaces that were affected. It is important to try to record as much of the situation as possible before any salvage or recovery operations begin. Usually, this documentation, regardless of the size of the event, takes the form of a written list accompanied by images.

3. The Salvage and Recovery (e.g. staff worked to recover all the damaged collection materials and the commercial company recovered the building assets)

This documentation focuses on recording the damage related to the event and the activities during response and recovery operations. Details include who was involved, staff, volunteers, and contractors, noting their names, positions, companies and contact information. Also note who made the decisions, what those decisions were, and who did what and when they did it.

During this phase, documentation should also include an accounting of what resources were required, such as supplies, equipment, and transportation, who ordered or authorized their procurement and from where.

Taking a picture of a business card is a quick and accurate way to note the on-site contractors.

Collection Salvage Documentation

Why Do We Document the Salvage of the Collection?

Whether a large or small emergency, the salvage of collections is usually too complex and time consuming to remember everything clearly and accurately. As custodians of collections, we are committed to responsible collections stewardship which includes ongoing documentation. Capturing details about collections-related activities is essential for several reasons:

- It tracks objects to ensure that nothing goes missing
- It ensures that items continue to be linked to the knowledge, stories and information that is contained in collections records
- It aids in ongoing planning and monitoring salvage and recovery operations
- It documents decisions that were made and by whom.
- It produces a log of damage as it is discovered, as well as the actions that are taken along the way
- It provides a record of the condition and treatment of objects throughout the salvage process. This record forms part of the object's permanent file.
- It provides detailed information to the collection caretakers, stakeholders and insurers about the extent of damage and the potential cost of further recovery
- It can help you obtain additional resources

What is Collection Salvage Documentation?

Salvage is everything that is done to the collection to remedy the impact of an emergency. Documentation of salvage is **a record** of everything that happens to the collection, the actions taken to deal with damage to the collection, when and where this work takes place, the people involved, and the decisions being made that relate to the collections. The extent of the documentation can depend on the extent of materials that are damaged, the resources available, and the size of the disaster.

Regardless of the size of your operation, you must write down some level of information about the items involved in the salvage. For example, if 4 objects fell off a shelf due to an earthquake and broke, you might just identify each item on a sheet of paper, examine and photograph each, wrap the pieces in a bundle and return them to the shelf. If several shelves toppled and many items were affected, the documentation would be much more extensive. Regardless of the scale of the event, all levels of salvage documentation share similar aspects.

Salvage documentation does not include non-collections-related information about the event such as the extent of damage to the site and what is being done about it. This type of documentation is discussed previously.

What is Included in Collection Salvage Documentation?

There are 3 aspects to Salvage Documentation:

1. Information Collected During the Site Assessment and the Triage Decisions
2. Tracking the Location of Collection Materials
3. Object Condition and Treatment Records

1. Information Collected During the Site Assessment and the Triage Decisions

There is important collection related information that should be documented during the initial on-site assessment. Document the more logistical elements like the location in the building where the event happened, floor and room numbers, etc. Where staff resources are limited, this may also serve as the Non-Collection Event Documentation discussed above.

Then collect the following information in the following priority:

- Note the location of the affected objects such as on shelves or on the floor. Be aware that this may or may not be their original pre-event location.
- Record the types of objects that are damaged.
- Document the types of damage that will guide triage decisions.

2. Tracking the Location of Collection Materials

Before the event, you knew where your collections were in storage or on exhibit. Regardless of whether you have a computer database of specific object locations, or written lists of what items are on what shelves, or even just the knowledge that everything you care for is in one storage room, there is existing location information for the collection. During and after an emergency, you should always know the location of your collection materials at some level.

The emergency may have made collections storage and display locations unsafe for the items they contain. In the majority of instances, collection materials will need to be removed from the event location to a secure, clean, dry space. Begin by documenting the location where the item was found as this can help to connect it to the collections records and reduce the risk of losing information about the item.

Remember to take a lot of photographs, right from the start!

It's a good idea to assign a location code to each object or group of objects before moving them.

If access to the collection data-base or inventory records is possible, updating them in real time may be an option.

If an unnumbered item is found close to one that still has an inventory/accession number, recording this proximity may help those who know the collection well to determine the identity of the unnumbered item.

It's essential to record where the collection objects are at all times. Use the tools and resources at hand, whether written or electronic, detailed or basic. Where was the item found? Where is it being moved to at every stage? Create lists or tables, using spreadsheets or databases if appropriate, so that you can locate and keep track of items as they are salvaged and recovered, potentially moving to several locations for treatment before returning to storage or display.

Good location tracking systems reduce the risk of objects being lost and ensures documentation is in place for insurance claims. They should be adapted to the disaster situation, the institutional needs, and available resources..

Various options are available for tracking collections, either for individual objects, or groups of objects (eg. labelling tracking containers and mapping locations).

Admin Basement Room 106: Aisle 7 on the floor								
Item	**Inventory Number**	**Temporary Location 1**	**Temporary Location 2**	**Temporary Location 3**	**Box #**	**Truck #**	**Temporary Location 4**	**Final Destination**
Emily Carr Painting	BV00.22.11	Salvage Workroom 1 -Frame Removal	Salvage Workroom 1 -Surface Cleaning	Drying room Shelf #2	5	875BE	Loading Dock	Admin Basement 106, Painting Rack Aisle 7
Leather Book	SALV35	Salvage Workroom 2 - drying						Deaccessioned by Curator, signed off by Manager
Lace Dress	BV998.7.18 Item recognized by curator	Salvage Workroom 3 -Rinsing	Salvage Workroom 2 -Drying Tent		6	875BE	Loading Dock	Admin Basement 107

Example of a centrally-located tracking sheet that should be filled in before or after each object is moved.

Date	#objects today	Identifying Number/ Accession Number	Object Type	Object Condition as found	Object Treatment/Notes
May 5'22	1	SALV35	Leather Book	Soaking wet	Air dried with blotters
	2	BV00.22.11	oil Painting/ Emily Carr	Damp with some surface dirt	Unframed, dried with support and surface cleaned after drying
	3	BV98.7.18	Lace Dress	Muddy and wet	Rinsed in clean water and laid to dry in drying tent padded out with crumpled tissue – Curator came by and could ID the dress and link it to the collections record number
May 6'22	1				

Example of Information to keep in a notebook at each workstation (eg. drying tent)

Location Codes

Ideally, storage units should already be codified and include a topographic location system. If this is the case, write this location information on the packing container or object label and log it in a written packing list with the identifying numbers of individual items. But if that is not the case, you will have to create a coding system to identify locations yourself. A location code is usually made up of letters and numbers. Start by numbering the row, bay, compartment and finally the shelf of the storage furniture. Then take pictures of the space and each of the storage units. Label the pictures with the new codes you devised.

Once the location code system is in place, you may place the objects into packing containers, labelled with the location code, and proceed to move them if necessary to a safer place or to a work area for salvage treatment.

Object Identification

It's important to assign a unique identification number for each salvaged item or group of items. It may be a more complex number if the item is made of many parts or is a group of things. This number can be the pre-event inventory barcode, catalogue, or accession number, that links the item to the collection records. However the original number may have been lost or become illegible due to water, fire or other damage. Or it may not be possible to access the collections database or inventory records immediately after an event. So a new number may be created to track items during the salvage operation.

- If the majority of the collection items still have original identification numbers or barcodes, use these numbers. For the few items that don't have numbers, assign and document a new numbering system that is shared with the rest of the salvage team.
- If most items have lost their pre-event number, then create a new numbering system and assign each item or lot a new number. Ensure that all team members, especially those charged with documentation, are informed and understand the numbering system.
- While there is no standard numbering system to recommend, choose something simple and stick to it for the duration of the salvage operation.
- The new numbering system should create context to ultimately link items and related salvage information back to the pre-event catalogue number and the information about the item in the collection records or database.

!

Commit to a numbering system right away and don't change this system part way through the salvage process.

TRACKING TIPS

- Label all containers so that information is visible from the outside.
- Identify packed boxes with unique sequential numbers in permanent marker. - give each packing crew a batch of numbers to avoid number repeats.
- If there is a large quantity of containers, give each a brief designation (e.g., floor/section designation and box number), and use a written inventory/packing list to record detailed information regarding contents, damage, and priority.

As materials are packed and removed, each packing container should be labeled on at least one long and one short side with a brief description of its contents. Describe contents by shelf, range, or call number, by cabinet or drawer, by record group or series, and so on. If time allows, also indicate the number of items in each box, describe the damage (e.g., "wet," "dry," "smoke," "mud," etc.), and indicate the salvage priority of items in the box. Also label the container with the institution/site name and date it was packed. If materials are going to different areas (e.g., some to the rinsing stations, others to the air-drying areas, and some to freezers), also note the intended destination of each packing container.

Adhesive labels can be used for boxes and other containers. Consider having adhesive labels pre-printed and include them in your disaster preparedness kit.

Beware that adhesive labels can fail in wet situations. Writing directly onto containers in indelible ink is preferred.

3. Object Condition and Treatment Records

The last aspect to salvage documentation is recording the physical condition of items (eg. broken, moldy, muddy, deformed, inks have bled) and any remedial action that was carried out on them (eg. cleaning, blotting, washing, freezing) during the salvage process. Taking note of the condition of materials at the assessment stage will help to guide the salvage team as triage and treatment decisions are made. While you may not be able to note the condition of every item during the initial, hectic salvage stage, you should try to capture the information at some point during the operation, such as at the end of each day and at each workstation. Even notes about the condition of groups of materials is helpful.

Keeping a notebook at each workstation enables other workers to maintain these records.

The information you gather about the condition and the steps that were taken to stabilize the objects will ultimately be added to your permanent object files for future reference.